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ABSTRACT

To determine the attitudes of Latino parents toward school discipline of elementary children, a questionnaire was sent to families of 120 first, third, and fourth grade Latino students in a Chicago public school. The parents were Spanish-speaking Mexican Americans of low socioeconomic status: some were recent arrivals from Mexico and others were long-time U.S. residents. The questionnaire, which was in both Spanish and English, contained 30 open-ended items related to three general questions: (1) Should schools use corporal punishment? (2) If so, who should be the disciplinarian and what form should punishment take? (3) If not, what forms of discipline would parents favor? The use of corporal punishment in the school was favored by 39% of the parents and rejected by 45%; 16% were undecided. Those favoring corporal punishment indicated that the punishment should be administered by the teacher, using the hand. The majority of those rejecting corporal punishment felt that embarrassing the child and standing the child in the classroom or hallway were acceptable forms of discipline. The parents' rejection of corporal punishment--unexpected in the light of traditional Latino child rearing practices, which include strict discipline and the use of corporal punishment with younger children--may reflect the parents' distrust of the school or their assimilation of American child rearing practices. (JH)

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THE ATTITUDES OF LATINO PARENTS
TOWARD SCHOOL DISCIPLINARY MEASURES

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Introduction

For years the use of corporal punishment has been an accepted practice in the schools. It is still an issue of great concern to parents and educators. Attitudes have changed. The courts, which supported school officials in the past in the use of "in loco parentis" in dealing with discipline problems, have been moving away from that principle. The courts appear to be changing their position as parents bring more and more suits against school staff using corporal punishment.¹ Nevertheless the change is slow. In recent judicial decisions the courts have ruled that the legality of corporal punishment depends on the circumstances involved in each case.² Education organizations have joined with parents in the fight against corporal punishment. The National Education Association

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Task Force, in 1972 published a report stating physical punishment could cause great harm to student's, increasing behavioral problems and causing lasting psychological damage.³

The increased pressure of parents and educators have resulted in the outlawing of corporal punishment in some cities and two states.⁴ New Jersey and Maryland have outlawed physical punishment, and banned in Washington, D.C., New York City, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Chicago and Grosse Point, Michigan to list a few. On the other hand, some parents regard spanking and other forms of physical punishment as acceptable, and the use of reasonable corporal punishment should be left within the powers of school administration and teachers.⁵

A 1970 Gallup Poll on corporal punishment shows that the majority of the people regard it as a desirable practice. It found that 62% of the people surveyed favored "spanking and similar forms of physical punishment" in the lower grades.⁶ In the same poll 53% said discipline in the schools was "not strict enough", 31% termed it "just right", and only 2% thought it was "too strict". The remaining 14% had no opinion. Goldstein points out that in too many instances parents view discipline and enforcement of institutional requirements as necessary and desirable for someone else's child.⁷ Their cry for control and discipline in the schools is

is really meant for someone else's child--not theirs.

Many teachers in large cities consider discipline to be the primary problem of the school. They are demanding more freedom to spank children. In a 1969 survey conducted by the National Education Association, 65% of the elementary teachers and 66% of the secondary teachers said they favored judicious use of corporal punishment.⁸ Overall, there has been slight shift to the "no" and "don't know" answers since 1960.

How do Latino parents feel about corporal punishment in the schools for their children? There are no studies indicating how Latino parents view teachers' role of handling discipline problems, although Latino parents tend to use corporal punishment with smaller children.⁹

The Latino family is a very closed-knit familial structure. The father has complete authoritative control over his family. The children are strictly disciplined. Latino parents expect their children to be quiet, submissive and respectful. Boys are expected to develop into men (machoism) of character. Girls, however, should develop into quiet, modest and virtuous women.¹⁰ Because of the strict, authoritarian family attitude, Latino students present

few serious problems for the teacher insofar as classroom discipline is concerned. Children strive to be good because they fear punishment by the teacher and their parents if they deviate from the expected behavior in the classroom.¹¹ A child who is punished in school by the teacher is often punished at home by the parents. Latino parents believe that the teacher is to be respected by the children in the same way as the parents. They appear to believe in the "in loco parentis" role of the teacher.

Problem:

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine the attitudes of Latino parents toward school discipline of primary-level children.

The study will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. Will parents reject the use of corporal punishment in schools?
2. If parents reject the use of physical discipline, what form of disciplinary measure will they accept or recommend?
3. If parents accept corporal punishment, who will be the school disciplinarian, and what is he allowed to use in disciplining the children?

Procedures:

The population of this ^{study} are Spanish-speaking Mexican-American parents of low-social income status whose children attend the primary grades of a Chicago Public School. Some of the parents are recent arrivals from Mexico, while others have lived in the United States since childhood.

The sample included one hundred and twenty Latino families of first, third and fourth grade children. The grade levels included

in the study were chosen on the basis of voluntary participation of teachers in those grades. A self-designed 30 item questionnaire was sent to the parents and returned by their children. The questionnaire was in both Spanish and English. The data were recorded in terms of the percentage of parent responses to each of the 30 items. The open-ended questions were recorded on the basis of general trends in responses. There was an 85% return of the questionnaires.

Findings:

The findings showed that the majority of parents do not favor corporal punishment. Responses to the general question, "Will parents reject the use of corporal punishment?" show that 39% of the parents are in favor of corporal punishment, 45% are against it, and 16% do not know whether physical punishment should be administered in the school. Therefore, the argument that Latino parents are inclined to use corporal punishment with smaller children does not support findings in the literature. Additional analysis shows, however, that 78% of the parents are in favor of disciplinary measures; only 20% are opposed to teachers using some alternative form of discipline, which indicates the majority of parents want their children to behave and to be disciplined in school.

The response to the question, "What form of discipline will parents accept if they reject corporal punishment?" Table 1 shows parents' responses to 11 forms of discipline.

TABLE I

DISCIPLINARY METHODS PREFERRED BY PARENTS

"WHAT FORM OF DISCIPLINE WILL PARENTS
ACCEPT IF THEY REJECT CORPORAL PUNISHMENT?"

<u>Method of Discipline</u>	<u>Percentage of Responses</u>
Suspend Child	45%
Expell Child	35%
Stand Child Outside Room	55%
Send Child Home	32%
Scream at Child	24%
Stand in Room	72%
Use Homework	47%
Embarrass Child	60%
Pinch Child	10%
Transfer to Another Room	38%
Transfer to Another School	5%

Table I shows that 72% or the majority of the parents prefer to have the children stand in the room, 60% prefer embarrassment, 55% prefer the child to stand outside the room, 47% prefer giving homework as punishment and 45% of the parents favor suspension. Pinching, the only corporal measure in the table is one of the least accepted, is favored by only 10% of the parents.

When the 39% of the parents who favored corporal punishment in the school were asked, "If you allow corporal punishment, who should administer it?" 46% selected the teacher, 15% the principal, 3% the assistant principals and 36% gave no response.

The 3% response for the assistant principal is paradoxical in that he or she is generally the school disciplinarian. Furthermore the 36% of the parents that did not answer the question are probably those who either oppose any form of corporal punishment or are ambivalent about its use by school personnel.

The 39% of the parents that favored corporal punishment were also asked, "If you allow corporal punishment, what should the teacher use?" Thirty percent chose the use of the hand, 17% a ruler, 8% a belt and 45% did not respond. The use of the hand being the least harmful method, taken together with the 45% non-response, possibly suggests a certain degree of fear towards corporal punishment on the part of the parents favoring its use in school.

To determine the disciplinary measures used in the home the parents were asked to respond to 2 questions:

1. "Who punishes the children at home?"
2. "How do you discipline your children at home?"

The findings show that 17% of the fathers administer discipline at home, 25% of the mothers said they administer the punishment and 50% of both mothers and fathers share the task of disciplining their children. Since it is traditionally known that the father is the authority figure in the Latino family, this could indicate a change in the role of the father and a change in the traditional attitude of Latino parents towards discipline. This change could be a determining factor in their negative response toward the use of corporal punishment in school. Also the findings do not necessarily indicate the use of corporal punishment in the home. This is supported by the question, "How do you discipline your child at home?" the majority of the parents favored non-corporal punishment methods, such as the withholding of privileges. Thirty-eight percent of the parents used corporal punishment--spanking (hand or belt) kneeling and standing; whereas 47% withheld privileges, such as T.V., no playing or staying in the house, or they counselled

the child or made him or her read and write or do homework. Fifteen percent of the parents did not respond to this question.

Parents were asked, "What do you think should be done to discipline children with serious discipline problems?" Table II shows their responses:

TABLE II

"WHAT DO YOU THINK SHOULD BE DONE TO DISCIPLINE
CHILDREN WITH SERIOUS DISCIPLINARY PROBLEMS?"

N=102	
Parent's Response	Percentage of Responses
Take Away Privileges	13%
Counseling	38%
Talk to Parents	15%
Expel	7%
Stand	2%
Don't Know	5%

Thirty-eight percent of the parents suggested counseling. On the other hand, contrary to Table I only 2% of the parents recommended standing. Furthermore, the parents did not recommend any corporal measures, (except standing), thus, demonstrating once again a dislike for physical punishment.

Conclusions and Discussion:

The findings reveal that 45% of the Latino parents responding to the questionnaire reject the use of corporal punishment in school. However, 78% of the parents expect the teacher to maintain discipline in the classroom and the majority of the parents accept the teacher as the school disciplinarian. The parents also suggest that children with serious disciplinary problems should be counseled.

Although Latino parents have tendencies to use corporal punishment with younger children, the study has indicated that most Latino parents are against such a practice. There are two variables which could have affected the findings. One variable is that the parents participating in the study are Mexican-American. These parents have grown up in the United States and many of them have assimilated values and child rearing practices of the American culture. On the other hand, some of the parents in the study are newly arrived from Mexico. They have had little contact with the school or the teachers because of lack of time or their inability to speak English. Therefore, these parents are fearful of allowing the teacher to use corporal

punishment on their children.

The findings also suggest a possible change in the traditional attitude of Latino parents toward discipline, which could have brought about the negative response concerning the use of corporal punishment at home and in school.

Additional research is needed using other Latino groups, a large sample and including parents with children at all grade levels--kindergarten--8th grade.

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